

## THIRD PART, QUESTION 88

### Of the Return of Sins Which Have Been Taken Away by Penance (In Four Articles)

We must now consider the return of sins which have been taken away by Penance: under which head there are four points of inquiry:

- (1) Whether sins which have been taken away by Penance return simply through a subsequent sin?
- (2) Whether more specially as regards certain sins they return, in a way, on account of ingratitude?
- (3) Whether the debt of punishment remains the same for sins thus returned?
- (4) Whether this ingratitude, on account of which sins return, is a special sin?

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#### Whether sins once forgiven return through a subsequent sin?

IIIa q. 88 a. 1

**Objection 1.** It would seem that sins once forgiven return through a subsequent sin. For Augustine says (De Bapt. contra Donat. i, 12): “Our Lord teaches most explicitly in the Gospel that sins which have been forgiven return, when fraternal charity ceases, in the example of the servant from whom his master exacted the payment of the debt already forgiven, because he had refused to forgive the debt of his fellow-servant.” Now fraternal charity is destroyed through each mortal sin. Therefore sins already taken away through Penance, return through each subsequent mortal sin.

**Objection 2.** Further, on Lk. 11:24, “I will return into my house, whence I came out,” Bede says: “This verse should make us tremble, we should not endeavor to explain it away lest through carelessness we give place to the sin which we thought to have been taken away, and become its slave once more.” Now this would not be so unless it returned. Therefore a sin returns after once being taken away by Penance.

**Objection 3.** Further, the Lord said (Ezech. 18:24): “If the just man turn himself away from his justice, and do iniquity. . . all his justices which he hath done, shall not be remembered.” Now among the other “justices” which he had done, is also his previous penance, since it was said above (q. 85, a. 3) that penance is a part of justice. Therefore when one who has done penance, sins, his previous penance, whereby he received forgiveness of his sins, is not imputed to him. Therefore his sins return.

**Objection 4.** Further, past sins are covered by grace, as the Apostle declares (Rom. 4:7) where he quotes Ps. 31:1: “Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.” But a subsequent mortal sin takes away grace. Therefore the sins committed previously, become uncovered: and so, seemingly, they return.

**On the contrary,** The Apostle says (Rom. 11:29): “The gifts and the calling of God are without repentance.” Now the penitent’s sins are taken away by a gift of God. Therefore the sins which have been taken away do not return through a subsequent sin, as though God

repented His gift of forgiveness.

Moreover, Augustine says (Lib. Resp. Prosperi i\*): “When he that turns away from Christ, comes to the end of this life a stranger to grace, whither does he go, except to perdition? Yet he does not fall back into that which had been forgiven, nor will he be condemned for original sin.”

**I answer that,** As stated above (q. 86, a. 4), mortal sin contains two things, aversion from God and adherence to a created good. Now, in mortal sin, whatever attaches to the aversion, is, considered in itself, common to all mortal sins, since man turns away from God by every mortal sin, so that, in consequence, the stain resulting from the privation of grace, and the debt of everlasting punishment are common to all mortal sins. This is what is meant by what is written (James 2:10): “Whosoever. . . shall offend in one point, is become guilty of all.” On the other hand, as regards their adherence they are different from, and sometimes contrary to one another. Hence it is evident, that on the part of the adherence, a subsequent mortal sin does not cause the return of mortal sins previously dispelled, else it would follow that by a sin of wastefulness a man would be brought back to the habit or disposition of avarice previously dispelled, so that one contrary would be the cause of another, which is impossible. But if in mortal sins we consider that which attaches to the aversion absolutely, then a subsequent mortal sin [causes the return of that which was comprised in the mortal sins before they were pardoned, in so far as the subsequent mortal sin]† deprives man of grace, and makes him deserving of everlasting punishment, just as he was before. Nevertheless, since the aversion of mortal sin is [in a way, caused by the adherence, those things which attach to the aversion are\*] diversified somewhat in relation to various adherences, as it were to various causes, so that there will be a different aversion, a different stain, a different debt of punishment, according to the different acts of mortal sin from which they arise; hence the question is moved whether the stain and the debt of eternal punishment, as caused by acts of sins previously pardoned, return through a

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\* Cf. Prosper, Responsiones ad Capitula Gallorum ii † The words in brackets are omitted in the Leonine edition.

subsequent mortal sin.

Accordingly some have maintained that they return simply even in this way. But this is impossible, because what God has done cannot be undone by the work of man. Now the pardon of the previous sins was a work of Divine mercy, so that it cannot be undone by man's subsequent sin, according to Rom. 3:3: "Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?"

Wherefore others who maintained the possibility of sins returning, said that God pardons the sins of a penitent who will afterwards sin again, not according to His foreknowledge, but only according to His present justice: since He foresees that He will punish such a man eternally for his sins, and yet, by His grace, He makes him righteous for the present. But this cannot stand: because if a cause be placed absolutely, its effect is placed absolutely; so that if the remission of sins were effected by grace and the sacraments of grace, not absolutely but under some condition dependent on some future event, it would follow that grace and the sacraments of grace are not the sufficient causes of the remission of sins, which is erroneous, as being derogatory to God's grace.

Consequently it is in no way possible for the stain of past sins and the debt of punishment incurred thereby, to return, as caused by those acts. Yet it may happen that a subsequent sinful act virtually contains the debt of punishment due to the previous sin, in so far as when a man sins a second time, for this very reason he seems to sin more grievously than before, as stated in Rom. 2:5: "According to thy hardness and impenitent heart, thou treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath," from the mere fact, namely, that God's goodness, which waits for us to repent, is despised. And so much the more is God's goodness despised, if the first sin is committed a second time after having been forgiven, as it is a greater favor for the sin to be forgiven than for the sinner to be endured.

Accordingly the sin which follows repentance

brings back, in a sense, the debt of punishment due to the sins previously forgiven, not as caused by those sins already forgiven but as caused by this last sin being committed, on account of its being aggravated in view of those previous sins. This means that those sins return, not simply, but in a restricted sense, viz., in so far as they are virtually contained in the subsequent sin.

**Reply to Objection 1.** This saying of Augustine seems to refer to the return of sins as to the debt of eternal punishment considered in itself, namely, that he who sins after doing penance incurs a debt of eternal punishment, just as before, but not altogether for the same "reason." Wherefore Augustine, after saying (Lib. Resp. Prosperi i\*) that "he does not fall back into that which was forgiven, nor will he be condemned for original sin," adds: "Nevertheless, for these last sins he will be condemned to the same death, which he deserved to suffer for the former," because he incurs the punishment of eternal death which he deserved for his previous sins.

**Reply to Objection 2.** By these words Bede means that the guilt already forgiven enslaves man, not by the return of his former debt of punishment, but by the repetition of his act.

**Reply to Objection 3.** The effect of a subsequent sin is that the former "justices" are not remembered, in so far as they were deserving of eternal life, but not in so far as they were a hindrance to sin. Consequently if a man sins mortally after making restitution, he does not become guilty as though he had not paid back what he owed; and much less is penance previously done forgotten as to the pardon of the guilt, since this is the work of God rather than of man.

**Reply to Objection 4.** Grace removes the stain and the debt of eternal punishment simply; but it covers the past sinful acts, lest, on their account, God deprive man of grace, and judge him deserving of eternal punishment; and what grace has once done, endures for ever.

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**Whether sins that have been forgiven, return through ingratitude which is shown especially in four kinds of sin?**

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IIIa q. 88 a. 2

**Objection 1.** It would seem that sins do not return through ingratitude, which is shown especially in four kinds of sin, viz., hatred of one's neighbor, apostasy from faith, contempt of confession and regret for past repentance, and which have been expressed in the following verse:

"Fratres odit, apostata fit, spernitque, fateri,  
Poenituisse piget, pristina culpa redit."

For the more grievous the sin committed against God after one has received the grace of pardon, the greater the ingratitude. But there are sins more grievous than these, such as blasphemy against God, and the sin against the Holy Ghost. Therefore it seems that sins already pardoned do not return through ingratitude as

manifested in these sins, any more than as shown in other sins.

**Objection 2.** Further, Rabanus says: "God delivered the wicked servant to the torturers, until he should pay the whole debt, because a man will be deemed punishable not only for the sins he commits after Baptism, but also for original sin which was taken away when he was baptized." Now venial sins are reckoned among our debts, since we pray in their regard: "Forgive us our trespasses [debita]." Therefore they too return through ingratitude; and, in like manner seemingly, sins already pardoned return through venial sins, and not only through those sins mentioned above.

**Objection 3.** Further, ingratitude is all the greater,

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\* Cf. Prosper, Responsiones ad Capitula Gallorum ii

according as one sins after receiving a greater favor. Now innocence whereby one avoids sin is a Divine favor, for Augustine says (Confess. ii): “Whatever sins I have avoided committing, I owe it to Thy grace.” Now innocence is a greater gift, than even the forgiveness of all sins. Therefore the first sin committed after innocence is no less an ingratitude to God, than a sin committed after repentance, so that seemingly ingratitude in respect of the aforesaid sins is not the chief cause of sins returning.

**On the contrary**, Gregory says (Moral. xviii\*): “It is evident from the words of the Gospel that if we do not forgive from our hearts the offenses committed against us, we become once more accountable for what we rejoiced in as forgiven through Penance”: so that ingratitude implied in the hatred of one’s brother is a special cause of the return of sins already forgiven: and the same seems to apply to the others.

**I answer that**, As stated above (a. 1), sins pardoned through Penance are said to return, in so far as their debt of punishment, by reason of ingratitude, is virtually contained in the subsequent sin. Now one may be guilty of ingratitude in two ways: first by doing something against the favor received, and, in this way, man is ungrateful to God in every mortal sin whereby he offends God Who forgave his sins, so that by every subsequent mortal sin, the sins previously pardoned return, on account of the ingratitude. Secondly, one is guilty of ingratitude, by doing something not only against the favor itself, but also against the form of the favor received. If this form be considered on the part of the benefactor, it is the remission of something due to him; wherefore he who does not forgive his brother when he asks pardon, and persists in his hatred, acts against this form. If, however, this form be taken in regard to the penitent who receives this favor, we find on his part a twofold movement of the free-will. The first is the movement of the free-will towards God, and is an act of faith quickened by charity; and against this a man acts by apostatizing from the faith. The second is a movement of the free-will against sin, and is the act of penance. This act consists first, as we have stated above (q. 85, Aa. 2,5) in man’s detestation of his past sins; and against this a man acts when he regrets having done penance. Secondly, the act of penance consists in the penitent purposing to subject himself to the keys of the Church by confession, according to Ps. 31:5: “I said: I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord: and Thou hast forgiven the wickedness of my sin”: and against this a man acts when he scorns to confess as he had purposed to do.

Accordingly it is said that the ingratitude of sinners is a special cause of the return of sins previously forgiven.

**Reply to Objection 1.** This is not said of these sins as though they were more grievous than others, but because they are more directly opposed to the favor of the forgiveness of sin.

**Reply to Objection 2.** Even venial sins and original sin return in the way explained above, just as mortal sins do, in so far as the favor conferred by God in forgiving those sins is despised. A man does not, however, incur ingratitude by committing a venial sin, because by sinning venially man does not act against God, but apart from Him, wherefore venial sins nowise cause the return of sins already forgiven.

**Reply to Objection 3.** A favor can be weighed in two ways. First by the quantity of the favor itself, and in this way innocence is a greater favor from God than penance, which is called the second plank after shipwreck (cf. q. 84, a. 6). Secondly, a favor may be weighed with regard to the recipient, who is less worthy, wherefore a greater favor is bestowed on him, so that he is the more ungrateful if he scorns it. In this way the favor of the pardon of sins is greater when bestowed on one who is altogether unworthy, so that the ingratitude which follows is all the greater.

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**Whether the debt of punishment that arises through ingratitude in respect of a subsequent sin is as great as that of the sins previously pardoned?**

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IIIa q. 88 a. 3

**Objection 1.** It would seem that the debt of punishment arising through ingratitude in respect of a subsequent sin is as great as that of the sins previously pardoned. Because the greatness of the favor of the pardon of sins is according to the greatness of the sin pardoned, and so too, in consequence, is the greatness of the ingratitude whereby this favor is scorned. But the greatness of the consequent debt of punishment is in accord with the greatness of the ingratitude. Therefore the debt of punishment arising through ingratitude in respect of a subsequent sin is as great as the debt of punishment due for all the previous sins.

**Objection 2.** Further, it is a greater sin to offend God than to offend man. But a slave who is freed by his

master returns to the same state of slavery from which he was freed, or even to a worse state. Much more therefore he that sins against God after being freed from sin, returns to the debt of as great a punishment as he had incurred before.

**Objection 3.** Further, it is written (Mat. 18:34) that “his lord being angry, delivered him” (whose sins returned to him on account of his ingratitude) “to the torturers, until he paid all the debt.” But this would not be so unless the debt of punishment incurred through ingratitude were as great as that incurred through all previous sins. Therefore an equal debt of punishment returns through ingratitude.

**On the contrary**, It is written (Dt. 25:2): “Accord-

\* Cf. Dial. iv

ing to the measure of the sin shall the measure also of the stripes be," whence it is evident that a great debt of punishment does not arise from a slight sin. But sometimes a subsequent mortal sin is much less grievous than any one of those previously pardoned. Therefore the debt of punishment incurred through subsequent sins is not equal to that of sins previously forgiven.

**I answer that,** Some have maintained that the debt of punishment incurred through ingratitude in respect of a subsequent sin is equal to that of the sins previously pardoned, in addition to the debt proper to this subsequent sin. But there is no need for this, because, as stated above (a. 1), the debt of punishment incurred by previous sins does not return on account of a subsequent sin, as resulting from the acts of the subsequent sin. Wherefore the amount of the debt that returns must be according to the gravity of the subsequent sin.

It is possible, however, for the gravity of the subsequent sin to equal the gravity of all previous sins. But it need not always be so, whether we speak of the gravity which a sin has from its species (since the subsequent sin may be one of simple fornication, while the previous sins were adulteries, murders, or sacrileges); or of the gravity which it incurs through the ingratitude connected with it. For it is not necessary that the measure of ingratitude should be exactly equal to the measure of the favor received, which latter is measured according to the greatness of the sins previously pardoned. Because it may happen that in respect of the same favor, one man is very ungrateful, either on account of the intensity of his scorn for the favor received, or on account of the gravity of the offense committed against the benefactor,

while another man is slightly ungrateful, either because his scorn is less intense, or because his offense against the benefactor is less grave. But the measure of ingratitude is proportionately equal to the measure of the favor received: for supposing an equal contempt of the favor, or an equal offense against the benefactor, the ingratitude will be so much the greater, as the favor received is greater.

Hence it is evident that the debt of punishment incurred by a subsequent sin need not always be equal to that of previous sins; but it must be in proportion thereto, so that the more numerous or the greater the sins previously pardoned, the greater must be the debt of punishment incurred by any subsequent mortal sin whatever.

**Reply to Objection 1.** The favor of the pardon of sins takes its absolute quantity from the quantity of the sins previously pardoned: but the sin of ingratitude does not take its absolute quantity from the measure of the favor bestowed, but from the measure of the contempt or of the offense, as stated above: and so the objection does not prove.

**Reply to Objection 2.** A slave who has been given his freedom is not brought back to his previous state of slavery for any kind of ingratitude, but only when this is grave.

**Reply to Objection 3.** He whose forgiven sins return to him on account of subsequent ingratitude, incurs the debt for all, in so far as the measure of his previous sins is contained proportionally in his subsequent ingratitude, but not absolutely, as stated above.

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**Whether the ingratitude whereby a subsequent sin causes the return of previous sins, is a special sin?**

IIIa q. 88 a. 4

**Objection 1.** It would seem that the ingratitude, whereby a subsequent sin causes the return of sins previously forgiven, is a special sin. For the giving of thanks belongs to counterpassion which is a necessary condition of justice, as the Philosopher shows (*Ethic.* v, 5). But justice is a special virtue. Therefore this ingratitude is a special sin.

**Objection 2.** Further, Tully says (*De Inv. Rhet.* ii) that thanksgiving is a special virtue. But ingratitude is opposed to thanksgiving. Therefore ingratitude is a special sin.

**Objection 3.** Further, a special effect proceeds from a special cause. Now ingratitude has a special effect, viz. the return, after a fashion, of sins already forgiven. Therefore ingratitude is a special sin.

**On the contrary,** That which is a sequel to every sin is not a special sin. Now by any mortal sin whatever, a man becomes ungrateful to God, as evidenced from what has been said (a. 1). Therefore ingratitude is not a special sin.

**I answer that,** The ingratitude of the sinner is sometimes a special sin; and sometimes it is not, but a cir-

cumstance arising from all mortal sins in common committed against God. For a sin takes its species according to the sinner's intention, wherefore the Philosopher says (*Ethic.* v, 2) that "he who commits adultery in order to steal is a thief rather than an adulterer."

If, therefore, a sinner commits a sin in contempt of God and of the favor received from Him, that sin is drawn to the species of ingratitude, and in this way a sinner's ingratitude is a special sin. If, however, a man, while intending to commit a sin, e.g. murder or adultery, is not withheld from it on account of its implying contempt of God, his ingratitude will not be a special sin, but will be drawn to the species of the other sin, as a circumstance thereof. And, as Augustine observes (*De Nat. et Grat.* xxix), not every sin implies contempt of God in His commandments. Therefore it is evident that the sinner's ingratitude is sometimes a special sin, sometimes not.

This suffices for the Replies to the Objections: for the first (three) objections prove that ingratitude is in itself a special sin; while the last objection proves that ingratitude, as included in every sin, is not a special sin.